



CAPTivations

Success Stories in Prevention

January 2002



CAPTivations is a publication of CSAP's Southwest Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies (CAPT) funded by cooperative agreement with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention.

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CSAP's Southwest CAPT is administered by the Southwest Prevention Center at the University of Oklahoma's College of Continuing Education. This document is printed at no cost to the taxpayers of the State of Oklahoma.

Community Partnership of the Ozarks

If ever a community lived up to the proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child," then Springfield, Missouri, is it.

Over the last dozen years, the organization now known as *Community Partnership of the Ozarks* has brought together community volunteers of all stripes—even liquor store owners—to tackle substance abuse prevention on many levels, and has chalked up several successful programs as a result.

The predecessor organization began in 1988 when the US Department of Justice's Kansas City office organized a task force in Springfield, said David Dixon, vice chairman of the *Ozarks Fighting Back* advisory board and psychology professor at Southwest Missouri State University.

In 1989, the group applied for a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant to focus on prevention. Dixon said the task force became *Ozarks Fighting Back* and some of the big names from the community were recruited to help write the grant proposal.

Ozarks Fighting Back did not get the Johnson Foundation Grant, but its members did not give up. As Charlie O'Reilly, a partnership founder and head of Springfield-based O'Reilly Auto Parts, said, "We'd brought together a good community group, . . . why not see what we can do?"

The group got a small grant to hire a grant writer and rework its original application in 1990 to go after a five-year Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) community grant. This time, the grant was funded.

Over the next five years, *Ozarks Fighting Back* concentrated on preventing substance abuse under the CSAP grant. From the beginning, the organization used the model of coalition building, bringing in the entire community to work together on prevention efforts, said Melissa Haddow, executive director of Community Partnership of the Ozarks.

Since the end of CSAP grant, and as

other sources of funding have become available, *Ozarks Fighting Back* has broadened its scope to become the *Community Partnership of the Ozarks*. "We saw there were interwoven problems," Haddow said. "We were seeing gang problems arising. We could see gang problems and family violence woven into drug and alcohol abuse problems."

Ozarks Fighting Back is now one of nine programs *Community Partnership of the Ozarks* manages, along with Community 2000 of Southwest Missouri, part of a statewide

prevention campaign to reduce alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use and abuse.

Community Partnership of the Ozarks also has its hand in over a dozen community collaborations, in areas ranging from workforce development to public safety to, of course, underage drinking. The underage drinking task force has drawn from many resources in the community, from Darrell Moore, Greene County prosecuting attorney, to college students, to the owners of the local Brown Derby liquor store chain.

"Some people questioned why we would involve them," Haddow said of the Brown Derby representatives. "But they have been our staunchest supporters. They agree there was a problem with underage youth gaining access to alcohol. We said to them that we all agree there is a problem. How can you help us be a part of the solution?"

With the help of Brown Derby management, the local NBC affiliate, and several convenience stores, the Community Partnership team developed an employee training kit, *Pathway to Selling Alcohol Safely*. The packet includes four videos, each 12-15 minutes long, focusing on how alcohol affects customers, state laws and regulations regarding sales to underage and intoxicated persons, and how clerks can handle situations in which they are



confronted with underage or intoxicated buyers.

The kit also includes quizzes and documentation of continuing education for store employees. It's designed so the employees can complete the training during break time, without ever having to leave the store, Haddow said.

The Community Partnership also worked with the community to get a keg registration ordinance passed this year. Now, when a keg is purchased, it is labeled and tagged so that if the keg shows up at a party where minors are caught drinking, the purchaser can be prosecuted.

And parents get the message loud and clear in Springfield that providing or allowing access to alcohol to minors is a crime. In the weeks preceding the prom, Moore, the county prosecuting attorney sends a letter to parents of high school students on his official letterhead and in envelopes from his office. The letter outlined the dangers of alcohol consumption by minors and that misdemeanor or felony penalties, as well as civil actions, await adults who allow students to have alcohol at prom parties. He also reminds them that if a student dies from alcohol poisoning, the adult who provided the alcohol could be charged with involuntary manslaughter.

The *Community Partnership* also has set up an *Underage Drinking Hotline* in Springfield people can call to report instances of underage drinking. "We figured most people would not call 911 to report underage drinking, but if you call the regular police number, they might not go out and respond for five days," Haddow said.

The *Underage Drinking Hotline* comes with a six-person DWI squad, with cell phones in their cars. The hotline is connected to an answering machine that the DWI squad checks every 30 minutes, Haddow explained.

Interestingly, people have been using the hotline not only to report underage drinking, but also to report underage persons trying to buy alcohol and public intoxication

violations, Haddow said.

Some programs the partnership starts become separate agencies. *Rare Breed* began in 2000 to address the needs of homeless youth in downtown Springfield. The partnership found a building and opened from 1 p.m. to 1 a.m., providing non-judgemental support, as well as food, clothes, games, and a place to go to be off the streets.

Rare Breed is now part of a Catholic-run homeless program, but now it is looking for funds to be open 24 hours a day, Haddow said. It's possible the partnership will become involved again to help find that funding.

The *Community Partnership* is now in the midst of a pilot project to teach high school students about the dangers of binge drinking and adding an element of social norming. Last

school year, Haddow had put up in one of Springfield's high schools a new poster every month on binge drinking and alcohol poisoning, and added table tents in the cafeteria reminding students to have an alcohol-free prom.

The *Community Partnership* also helped with a news article in the high school paper on binge drinking, and sponsored an essay contest in the spring on binge drinking. All the information on binge drinking seemed to pay off. In a random survey of the junior class at the end of the school year, 40 percent said they would be less likely to ride in a car with a driver who had been drinking, and 28 percent said they would be less likely to binge drink themselves.

This year, Haddow has written a grant to expand the *Don't Binge Drink* program to five schools, and has added a social norming model to two schools. This model—successfully used in colleges—states that most college students are not binge drinkers, despite messages to the contrary. The social norming program includes posters and other materials that states most drinkers consume fewer than four drinks at once, so why binge drink and go against the norm?

"We are very outcome oriented, and we will evaluate this," Haddow said. "We don't know if social norming will work at the high school level, but we will evaluate this to see if this will enhance the message on binge drinking. If it doesn't work, we'll throw it out. We're not afraid to make a mistake."



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Prevention Resources:

Center for Substance Abuse Prevention
www.samhsa.gov/centers/csap/csap.html

Decision Support System
www.preventiondss.org

Join Together
www.jointogther.org

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America
www.cadca.org

For this community success story and others from across the Southwest region, visit our website at <http://www.swcapt.org/products/success.html>